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FAITH AND FREEDOM

**THE CHRISTIAN FAITH
ACCORDING TO THE
LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS**

Leader's Guide

by James A. Nestingen

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SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY AT CLAREMONT California

FAITH AND FREEDOM

The Christian Faith According to the Lutheran Confessions

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Introduction

Probing the heart of the Lutheran Confessions, *Faith and Freedom* is full of possibilities for study in your congregation. It can be used for adult membership classes, with groups of people interested in renewing their understanding of the Lutheran heritage, or with people wanting a deeper acquaintance with the basic documents of our church.

Two characteristics of Dr. Anderson's book make it particularly suitable for these uses. First of all, *Faith and Freedom* is a clear summary of justification by faith as it is understood in the Lutheran Confessions. It goes directly to this central teaching and concentrates on it, unfolding all the other themes of the confessions in relation to justification—the teaching on which the church stands or falls.

But secondly, this discussion of justification is not just academic. Dr. Anderson's concern is how this Word of grace comes home in the midst of everyday life. Consequently, as he carefully lays out the Confessions' understanding of justification, Dr. Anderson always has his eye on the reader's concerns.

The purpose of this guide is to support this conversation between the Lutheran Confessions and interested readers—in particular to provide helps and suggestions that will assist in using *Faith and Freedom* as a study course.

Each congregation and each class has a unique personality. Because of this, these materials will have to be adapted. Leaders are encouraged to choose from the suggestions offered, picking out what will be most helpful in their particular situation.

The scheme of things

While *Faith and Freedom* could easily provide a basis for a much longer course, adult class teachers generally report best interest and participation in courses of about six sessions. You may discover as you get into the material that your group wants to go deeper and take longer. If so, the six sessions in this guide can be divided to provide material for as many periods as you may want.

To handle the seven chapters of the book in six sessions, Chapters 1 and 2 are considered together. They are introductory, discussing the historical background of the confessions and the purpose of confessional writings. The material in these chapters is important, but it is not as likely to provoke extensive class discussion as the chapters that follow.

As many teachers have discovered, it is possible to teach a class by staying a Saturday night ahead of the students. *Faith and Freedom* is too rich for that kind of treatment—to tap its riches you should read the book through completely before the class begins. That way you'll get a sense of proportion for the sessions and know from the beginning where you want to concentrate your time. Encourage the class to do the same thing—at least to skim through the book right at the start—to get an idea of what is to come.

For each of the six sessions, this guide is arranged in four parts: a statement of objectives, background, teaching options, and questions for discussion.

Setting objectives can be a real tug-of-war. The Confessions have their objectives, Dr. Anderson has his, this guide has objectives, and so do you and your class. When these objectives differ, as they easily can, the tug-of-war begins. Then effective teaching is very difficult.

It is important to have your objectives clearly in mind as you begin your study. Hopefully the objectives stated at the beginning of each session clearly reflect the objectives of the Confessions and Dr. Anderson. But they may not be your objectives or those of your class. If they are not, change and adapt them to fit your own situation more closely.

Whether you take the objectives as given or develop your own, it is crucial that your objectives be clearly stated and understood. Explain them to the members of the class; or better still, find out what they hope to achieve through this study and see if you can come to some agreement on your aims. Then you will know what you are trying to accomplish and can plan accordingly.

Dr. Anderson laces his discussion of the Confessions with historical background throughout the book, but holds back at some points to permit more development at others. The background given in this guide will help you take Dr. Anderson's discussion a step further. It is offered to indicate the kind of problems and options the Lutheran reformers had to consider, and in this way to

assist you in gaining a deeper understanding of the Confessions. The teaching options are just that—options and suggestions that you can take or leave depending on your own priorities and the priorities of the class.

It is anticipated that *Faith and Freedom* and the background material in this guide will give you enough resources for an opening statement or lecture in each session. But while a lecture is an efficient and helpful way to get information across, it doesn't actively involve the class. Therefore the teaching options are geared toward involving participants in discussion of the material.

The questions for discussion are starters. They can be given to the class members the week before a chapter is to be discussed, to help focus their reading. Or they can be used as a means of starting discussion in the actual class session. Either way, a good share of education is determining the questions that need to be asked. The questions suggested in this guide identify some important concerns. It is expected they will lead you to formulate other questions of your own.

Pick and choose

Leader's guides, such as this one, are somewhat of a necessary evil. They are necessary in the sense that many group leaders, even the best, find it useful to have a resource providing some assistance in the challenges of teaching. But guides can be evil, too, particularly if a leader assumes that a guide is equivalent to an eleventh commandment and must be followed rigidly.

A leader's guide is a *guide*. As such, it can tell you where the fish are, maybe, and what they're biting. But paper and ink can't fish. There should be times when you push the guide away and say, "That won't work here," or "That sounds ridiculous." Hopefully there won't be too many of those times. But you're in charge of this guide—the guide isn't in charge of you. Consequently you can pick and choose as you see fit.

Resources

Since this is a study of the Christian faith according to the Lutheran Confessions, it would be ideal to ask each class member to read both the *Book of Concord* and Dr. Anderson's book.

That isn't a realistic expectation. The best edition of the *Book of Concord*, edited by Dr. Theodore G. Tappert and published by

Fortress Press in Philadelphia, is a solid 600 pages long. And not every page will keep people on the edge of their chairs.

Don't discount the possibility, however, that some members of your class would be willing to accept the challenge of reading this volume. In fact, they might enjoy it—particularly people used to doing a lot of homework or who already have a basic knowledge of Lutheranism and want to deepen it.

But if you make reading the *Book of Concord* a requirement, your class is likely to dwindle in a hurry. Therefore, some alternatives are in order.

At the very least, every member of the class should read the Augsburg Confession, also known as the Augustana, and the Small Catechism. These two documents claim the highest authority (below the Scriptures) of all of the Lutheran Confessions, and are the basic documents in the *Book of Concord*. Furthermore, they aren't long. They can be read in a few minutes.

Besides the Augustana and the Small Catechism, the most interesting and readable of the Confessions is Luther's *Large Catechism*. Luther wrote it for pastors and teachers in his day—it is as down to earth as an old shoe and plainly powerful. You could ask those who are interested to read it and share its insights in your discussion.

Another possibility would be to ask each member of the class to read one of the other Confessions besides the Augustana and the Small Catechism: the Apology, The Smalcald Articles, the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, The Large Catechism, or the Formula of Concord. Each reader could then report back to the class on the document read.

A final alternative would be to skip any reading in the *Book of Concord* and simply concentrate on *Faith and Freedom*. This would be an unfortunate limitation for adults who already know something of Lutheranism, but it might be a good suggestion for an adult membership class.

At the end of *Faith and Freedom* Dr. Anderson provides an annotated bibliography of books on the Lutheran Confessions. His notes are helpful, and indicate resources you can use for your own preparation or can recommend for those interested in further study.

A new book has come out since Dr. Anderson's—*Lutheranism: The Theological Movement and Its Confessional Writings*—by Eric W. Gritsch and Robert W. Jenson (Fortress Press, 1976). It

requires more theological background than *Faith and Freedom*, but would be a helpful companion volume for you and interested class members.

Printed copies of the Confessions are available in the form of Tappert's edition of the *Book of Concord*, which has already been mentioned. *This We Believe* (Augsburg, 1958) contains the Augstana and the Small Catechism. There are two English translations of Luther's Large Catechism—an older translation by J. N. Lenker (Augsburg, 1967) and the translation from the Tappert edition of the *Book of Concord* which has been issued as a separate book (Fortress, 1961).

1 The Confessions- yesterday and today

Objectives

1. To introduce the course, making clear its purposes and the resources and methods to be used to achieve these purposes.
2. To provide some historical background for the Creeds and the Lutheran Confessions.
3. To discuss the functions of the creeds and Confessions for the church and individual Christians today.

Basis in "Faith and Freedom"

Chapter 1—"The Story of the Lutheran Confessions"

Chapter 2—"The Need for Confessional Writings"

Background

This is the groundwork session, where the excavating is done and the foundation laid. A couple of questions are basic: What are the Lutheran Confessions? And why study the Christian faith according to them?

Dr. Anderson has answered these questions by describing the individual creeds and Confessions in Chapter 1 and discussing the functions of confessions in Chapter 2.

As you begin your study you'll have to answer these questions, too—or at least take some tentative steps toward answering them. And you'll probably have to do so before the students have had a chance to look at the answers in the book.

The following background information is intended to help you open up these questions, and to introduce the first two chapters. It provides a framework in which these chapters can then be read and considered.

On p. 31 of *Faith and Freedom* is a statement that addresses both questions:

The gospel, the good news of God in Jesus Christ, is always contrary to our natural schemes. We are by nature legalists, and would like to believe that in some way we have a claim on God, that his grace in some sense depends on our goodness, our intellect, our piety. The good news is that we are loved because of what God is, not what we are and deserve. This message is never something that one memorizes, or captures and then has forever. We are reminded of it each day, or we turn again to some self-centered, self-praising scheme, some theology of barter in which we trade our supposed goodness for God's approval and acceptance.

This understanding of the gospel brought about the Lutheran Confessions. You undoubtedly know something of Luther's story. As an Augustinian monk he was assigned in the early part of the 16th century to teach the Scriptures at Wittenberg University in what is now East Germany. In his own struggles as an individual and teacher of the church, he came to recognize this Word—that God justifies the ungodly by faith, apart from works of the law—as the heart of Scripture. This discovery freed Luther from his personal torment and opened up Scripture in a new way for him.

At the same time, this understanding of the gospel exposed to Luther the abuses of the Roman Church of the Middle Ages. Proclaiming this gospel and attacking the abuses, Luther struck a responsive nerve in the church in Germany and the surrounding countries. With growing support, he appealed to the pope for a "free and general council of the church"—a meeting of all bishops in which they could consider needed reforms without fear of censorship by the papacy.

Luther first made his appeal for a council in 1518. He repeated it many times, as did those who saw with him that justification by faith is the heart of the gospel. They hoped that such a council would bring about the needed reforms without leading to a break in the unity of the church.

These hopes turned out to be an illusion, however. The popes of the time steadfastly refused to call such a council, and when, years after Luther's first appeal, the pope finally did announce a

council, he called it for "the utter extirpation of the poisonous and pestilential Lutheran heresy."

As they appealed the reform, Luther and his followers were repeatedly called upon to explain their understanding of the gospel. The Lutheran Confessions were born in this context. They were written with two purposes in mind.

First, Luther and his associate Melanchthon wanted to spell out clearly their understanding that justification by faith is the key concept of Scripture and the church. They did not believe that this was a new or even a uniquely Lutheran idea. Rather, they understood it as the heart of God's message to all—a Word of comfort, releasing tormented consciences from guilt and fear. In the Confessions they sought to proclaim this Word and explain its implications for the church.

Second, despite the fact that Luther had been excommunicated from the church and declared an outlaw by the emperor, he and Melanchthon still hoped that this teaching of justification could be restored to its central place without breaking the church's unity. So, as they wrote, they sought to emphasize their unity with the church, hanging on in the hope of reconciliation.

The Formula of Concord, the only Confession not written by either Luther or Melanchthon, shares these same characteristics. "We are minded to manufacture nothing new," the authors of the Formula said, pointing back to Luther and Melanchthon and the Word which they proclaimed. And even though the split with Rome had come long before the Formula was written, the Lutherans who wrote it were still loyal to the tradition of the whole church.

These two purposes define the Lutheran Confessions. They spell out the Lutheran understanding of the gospel, and they do so as documents of reconciliation, written in hope that the unity of the church will be preserved.

The pope and the holy Roman emperor, the chief officials of medieval Europe, replied to the Lutheran appeals with force. They drove the Lutherans out of the Roman Church. The separation was confirmed by the Council of Trent, which met off and on from the 1540s to the 1560s, and officially condemned the Lutheran understanding of the gospel—or more accurately, a caricature of it. Lutheran princes met this force with force of their own, and though they came perilously close to defeat, they were able to win



legal recognition for Lutheranism as a separate church in the Peace of Augsburg in 1555.

But we don't study the confessions now just because of a failure of the church in the past. Why do we study the Lutheran Confessions long after the situation which resulted in their being written has passed? We study them because of the clarification and help they offer us as "pointers, treasures, and anchors" (pp. 26-32, *Faith and Freedom*). As in the Middle Ages, today, even in the church, we do not always recognize the message that Luther, Melancthon, and the other reformers understood to be at the heart of God's Word.

The gospel doesn't need clarification. It speaks for itself, and it speaks clearly—resounding through the Scriptures to address each one of us. We are the ones who need clarification. As Dr. Ander-

son points out, "... we are by nature legalists, and would like to believe that in some way we have a claim on God, that his grace in some sense depends on our goodness, our intellect, our piety" (p. 31). We are always either turning the gospel into something we have to do for God or passing over it as something that really doesn't matter.

Consequently, we need "pointers, treasures, and anchors"—documents which proclaim the gospel clearly. Believing that the Confessions do this, Lutherans have listened to them for four centuries. We have not always listened well, or heard clearly, nor are we likely to do better in the future. But the Confessions speak clearly. To the most basic question that can be asked in the church—What is the gospel?—they set forth a plain answer: "The good news is that we are loved because of what God is, not what we are and deserve" (*Faith and Freedom*, p. 31).

Teaching options

Introducing the class

If it can be arranged, one of the best ways to get a class such as this going is to gather informally for the first session. For instance, you could have supper together and follow it with a discussion digging into the introductory questions. In conjunction with such a gathering, you could show the motion picture *Luther* or its shorter, more current version, *Luther for the '70s*, supplementing the film with specific information about the Confessions. Then you could move into a discussion of why the Christian faith is being studied according to the Confessions.

If you are teaching *Faith and Freedom* as an adult membership course, this kind of informal start would be especially helpful. It would give newcomers a chance to get acquainted with you and with other class members and would set the tone for the discussions.

In adult membership classes, as in confirmation classes for youth, it is helpful to make use of sponsors—members of the church council or others in the congregation who agree to participate in the class work with one of the newcomers. Besides providing support in the class, this arrangement provides a way for introducing new people to active members of the congregation who can help them move into the swing of things.

Whatever tack you take—whether you begin formally or informally, whether it is an adult membership class or a part of your

church school—it is important, right off the bat, to set out some notion of what can be expected. You can do this by announcing the purposes of the course and your own hopes for it, and then asking for reactions to these purposes and hopes. Encourage class members to state their own expectations. See if you can arrive at a consensus as to what you want to accomplish. It is important that all understand what you are about so that no one will feel misled or cheated because things don't develop as hoped.

Be sure you come to an agreement at the beginning as to what preparation class members will be expected to make for each session. Along with *Faith and Freedom*, have on hand copies of other books in which you will encourage or assign readings, such as the *Book of Concord*, *This We Believe*, and *Luther's Large Catechism*.

Moving into discussion

After clarifying and agreeing on expectations, the next step is to deal with the introductory questions: What are the Lutheran Confessions? And why should we study the Christian faith according to them? One option for dealing with these questions has already been mentioned—showing a film on Luther and then adding comments on the Confessions.

Another option would be a straight lecture. You could pull together the information presented in this guide along with the information in the first two chapters of *Faith and Freedom*, and simply present it to the class in lecture form. Then you could ask the class to read the first three chapters, reviewing the material you've presented, and preparing for discussion the next time you meet, when you take on the third chapter.

While this might be the most efficient way to get started, a better option would be to combine some discussion with lecture, particularly of the second question, Why study the Confessions?

It might be worth finding out what the members of the class know about the Confessions. Do they know what documents are considered Confessions? Do they know that the Small Catechism is a confession? Have they ever read any of the Confessions?

If you can find newspaper or magazine references to some observance of an anniversary of the Lutheran Confessions, point them out to the class.

Considering the usual definition of *confession*, are class members bothered by the term being used as a statement of faith? Point out

that we use the word this way every Sunday when we confess or declare our faith in the words of a creed which could also be called a confession.

You may want to have on hand a copy of your congregation's constitution to see whether it makes reference to the Confessions. If it does, consider why, and what meaning such a reference has to members.

You might also use printed copies of the Confessions—the *Book of Concord* or *This We Believe*—to introduce the documents. Calling attention first to the confession that is generally known best, the Small Catechism, you could move on to the Augustana and then the others, giving information about them from Dr. Anderson's discussion in Chapter 1. This introduction could be done fairly quickly.

Then you could open up the second and more important question, Why study the Christian faith according to the Lutheran Confessions? This question will provoke different reactions according to the backgrounds of the class. Even if they haven't known about confessions other than the Small Catechism before, people with a strong background in Lutheranism may be inclined to answer, "We ought to study them because they (or we) are Lutheran."

On the other hand, some people may pick up on this question and use it as a challenge, believing that to study the Lutheran Confessions is too narrow an approach for our day.

It will be a great spur to discussion if you have a mixture of these two reactions in your group. Get individuals to state their reasons for thinking as they do, and after some discussion, suggest Dr. Anderson's reasons for studying the Confessions.

If your class doesn't have this mixture and leans toward one view or the other, you can push from the other side to set up a discussion of the author's response.

People may ask, "Isn't the Bible the rule and norm of Christian theology? If so, why worry about Lutheran writings?" Or they may ask, "Isn't this an ecumenical age, when the old divisions in the church are being set aside to move toward a deeper unity? Why be so fussy about being Lutheran, then?"

When these questions have been recognized by the group as serious concerns, you can move into Dr. Anderson's treatment of them. The Confessions aren't studied simply because they are Lutheran. As K. F. A. Kahnis, a 19th century German theologian, once re-

marked, "Anyone who says that something is true just because it is Lutheran is no Lutheran." To do so would be to set the Confessions above Christ and the gospel.

On the other side, the Confessions are not to be set aside because they are Lutheran. They are Lutheran writings, certainly, but not just Lutheran. Their whole reason for existence is to bear witness to the gospel, and as such they have an important purpose and place in our church.

Another approach for your opening session is suggested by a pastor who taught *Faith and Freedom* in a large congregation. Recognizing that one of the most fascinating things about Lutheranism is the way it holds to the middle ground, oftentimes putting things together that appear contradictory, he started his discussion with the class by pointing this out.

The example this pastor used was the Lord's Supper. The Roman Catholic theologians of the Middle Ages argued that the bread and wine became the actual body and blood of Jesus; Zwingli, on the other hand, argued that the Lord's Supper is a memorial meal, where what is central is our remembering Christ's suffering and death. Luther went right between them, arguing that according to Christ's promise, he is present in the supper but that no theory can explain how. Where Roman Catholics and Reformers to the left of Luther formed the question as either/or, Luther and his followers insisted on saying both/and: both bread and body, both sinful and justified, both human and divine, not either one or the other.

If you take this approach, you might follow it through by showing how this attitude is appropriate in dealing with the Confessions themselves. On one extreme is legalism, enforcing the Confessions as law: "This is what Lutherans say, therefore you better say it, too." The opposite point of view is a confessional relativism: "There are many different points of view, and the Lutheran is just one of them; therefore we can take it or leave it."

Dr. Anderson goes right between these two alternatives, arguing that the Confessions are not to be either enforced as law or set aside, but are crucial for us insofar as and because they proclaim the gospel.

A final option that might help you in dealing with the discussion questions is to consider one of the most intriguing comments in the first two chapters of *Faith and Freedom*. On p. 18, Dr. Anderson speaks of truth as a person. "Truth for them (for the Confessors)

was essentially in a person, in God. To be true was to be in relationship with this person. One knows the truth, not by scientific analysis, moving from the particular to the general, but by revelation of a person and his will."

This statement sums up one of the most important, if not *the* most important, characteristics of the Confessions. From the point of view of the Confessions, truth is not a statement that somebody makes. Truth is a person—one person, Jesus Christ. To know the truth, then, isn't to know something *about* Jesus—that he had brown hair and a beard, for instance. Rather, it is to know *Jesus*—as someone who loves you and gives himself for you.

There are things that are important to know *about* Jesus: that he was crucified, raised from the dead on the third day, and that he is the Son of God who will come again to raise the living and the dead as Lord of the universe. Because it is important to know these things, the Confessions carefully set them forth.

But a person can know all sorts of things *about* the truth without *knowing* the truth—that Jesus died and rose again for *me*, that he has promised to ". . . raise me and all the dead and will grant eternal life to me and to all who believe in Christ" (Small Catechism). That is the heart of the Confessions' concern—that the truth be known in person, in Christ.

At the same time, the fact that truth is a person, Jesus Christ, says something about the Confessions themselves. Because truth is a person, it is not something that can be written down and either enforced or ignored. The person who loves you doesn't try to force you to believe it. And when you really hear that word of love as a word for you, you don't just shrug your shoulders and walk away.

A word of love can only be told, never enforced. And a word of love that is told wants to be told again, so that it gets out every day, so that it can be heard again.

This statement, that truth is a person, can help you get into the second question—Why study the Christian faith according to the Confessions?—in an interesting way. Further, it will set things up so that you can move right into the discussion of justification next week.

Questions for discussion

The two principal questions for consideration in this session have already been dealt with. They will probably lead to many

other questions. You may want to consider the desirability of requiring adherence to the Confessions as a basis for membership in a church body or congregation. What are the advantages for a church in having such statements as its foundation? How important is loyalty to a denomination?

Laymen (princes) signed the Augsburg Confession. How do you account for the fact that such a statement is usually considered the province of professional theologians today, and of little concern to lay people?

Let the class members share any value they have found in the Confessions for their own lives (for example, in the Small Catechism).

One closing note: Assigning the first three chapters makes a pretty good size reading assignment for a week (53 pages), but if you can get by with it you'll be prepared to start with the real meat of the book next week. Those who can't read the whole amount should at least read pp. 24-53.

2 Justification: the center of the Lutheran Confessions

Objectives

1. To declare the Word that "God justifies freely, because of Christ through faith."
2. To define the key terms *justification* and *faith* as they are used in the Lutheran Confessions.
3. To help group members understand what is involved for them in justification by faith.

Basis in "Faith and Freedom"

Chapter 3—"Justification: The Center of the Lutheran Confessions"

Background

In this session your job is both easier and more difficult. It is easier because this time, if the class members have done their reading, there is more basis for discussion. It is more difficult because in our self-centered rebelliousness there is nothing we resist more than the idea that God justifies by faith.

In Chapter 3 of *Faith and Freedom*, Dr. Anderson has provided an excellent analysis of the kind of problems that come up when justification is discussed. Lurking behind them all is the question, Who justifies? Together with that question there are two others: How does this justification happen? And what does it involve for us? Dr. Anderson answers all three in one simple sentence: "God justifies, freely, because of Christ through faith" (p. 47). He amplifies this sentence in his discussion.

To provide some additional background as you prepare for this session, we can supplement Dr. Anderson's sentence a bit by looking at three concerns: the purpose of the Law, the power of the Word, and the nature of faith.



First of all, on pp. 37-39 Dr. Anderson discusses three different views of how the relationship between God and us is established: the Pelagian view, the semi-Augustinian (also called semi-Pelagian) view, and what Dr. Anderson calls "the monergism of grace." The three views have different understandings of the law.

Both the Pelagian and semi-Pelagian view hold that God gave the law as a way of salvation. They say that through the law God tells us what we are to do and not do so that we might come into a right relationship with him and stay in that relationship. They then answer the three questions mentioned earlier by saying that we justify ourselves with some help from God; that this justi-

fication comes about by the law; and that what it involves for us is doing what the law requires.

The only difference between a full Pelagian and a semi-Pelagian view is a difference of degree in the amount of help God gives. In a full Pelagian view, we are basically on our own with the law. In a semi-Pelagian view, God places some power in us enabling us to do the law. In both views, the law is the way of salvation.

What Dr. Anderson calls divine monergism—which Paul, Augustine, and Luther understood to be the biblical view—begins with a different understanding of the law. In this view the law is not, was not, and never will be a way of salvation. Who justifies, and how? God justifies freely, apart from the law, because of Christ.

Although it is not the way of salvation, the law has other purposes. First, it keeps order in the world—preventing the sin in us from biting and devouring everything in sight. Second, it drives us to God's promise to justify us by showing us that we cannot justify ourselves. Many Lutherans argue that the law has a third purpose: to be a guide for those who are justified, showing what Christians should do in response to God's grace.

Like shooting at a moving target, it is not always so easy to see the differences between these two views of the law as it relates to justification. Pelagianism and semi-Pelagianism are sneaky, hiding in little words like *if*, *and*, or *but*—words which attach a condition to the gospel promise. When the gospel is set out in this way, we have to do something before God can be for us. In the biblical view, the gospel is an unconditional gift and promise.

Along with these two different views of the law, there are also two different views of the Word of God. In the Pelagian or semi-Pelagian view, God's Word is basically information. Through it God conveys what he wants or expects from us and what he will do if and when the conditions are met. When we hear this Word we go to work to fulfill its requirements.

In keeping with passages like Genesis 1, Jeremiah 23, Isaiah 55, Romans 10, and countless others, Luther held that God's Word does much more than pass along information. It is a powerful Word, a Word that does what it says and accomplishes what it purposes. It is "living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword . . ." (Heb. 4:12).

Hearing God's Word is like hearing someone say, "I love you." When you hear such a word, you don't shrug your shoulders and

say, "That's nice information." Nor do you say to yourself, "Now I'd better respond to that and say something nice, too." Such a word does something to you—it provokes a response in you. You either smile and blush or you turn tail and run. It is a powerful, active word.

While emphasizing the power and effectiveness of the Word, Luther and the Confessions also emphasize its down-to-earth quality—as Paul does in Romans 10: "The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart. . . ." God's Word is the Word of Christ proclaimed in Scripture. It is also the Word of Christ proclaimed by a preacher, by a mother or father to a son or daughter, and by one neighbor to another. God puts his all-powerful Word to work in the most common, down to earth, and ordinary ways.

This understanding of the Word is very helpful in considering whether justification is simply a declaration or accomplishes an inner change (*Faith and Freedom*, pp. 41-44). If God's Word were simply information, then being declared righteous would stop with the information that it has happened. But because God's declaration is a powerful Word, being declared righteous brings about change in us.

The power isn't in *us*—it is God's power at work *in his Word*. Thus being declared righteous and changing aren't two different things. To be declared righteous by God is to be changed, to be brought into a brand new relationship with him, to be renewed, empowered, strengthened, and given a new beginning.

This leads to different views of the nature of faith. In a Pelagian or semi-Pelagian understanding, faith is simply believing the information that God has given. It is assent, acknowledging that the information is true. Sometimes in such a way of thinking, faith is given a wider definition. It is not only believing that the information is true, but relying on it, depending on God to keep his Word. But faith is basically an act of the individual according to this point of view. And it is a preliminary matter to what really counts: obedience to the law.

One other characteristic of this view of faith is important here. As the Pelagians and semi-Pelagians generally see it, faith removes a person from temptation. That is, in faith an individual grows toward perfection, becoming better and better.

Luther and the Confessions, as Dr. Anderson indicates, define faith in the wider sense. It is similar to hearing a word of love—you

not only believe that it is true but you rely on it, even stake your life on it. In the same way a person hearing the Word of God in faith believes and trusts it.

But this faith is in no sense the work of the individual. There are passages, as Dr. Anderson says, where Luther refers to faith as the "greatest work." But as other commentators have pointed out, Luther later regretted having spoken of faith in this way. Rather than being a work of the individual, it is a work of God in the individual, accomplished through the Word.

This does not mean that the individual does not respond in some way. Rather, faith goes to work in love. "Just as a cold stone cannot help but be warmed by the sun," Luther said, "so a Christian cannot help but do good works."

It is like a happily married couple. They don't have to earn each other's love; they have promised to love one another until death and they believe or have faith in each other's promises. But this kind of faith doesn't simply sit still. It is active. Because a husband believes that his wife loves him, he tries to please her. And because a wife believes that her husband loves her, she does the same thing for him.

The term *happily married* has to be used here, though. Marriage is not only a love feast but also a battleground. When faith and love aren't enough to hold the couple together happily, the law has to come in and speak its message: "You shall not commit adultery."

In the same way, faith does not remove us from temptation but places us in the midst of it. This is another crucial difference between the Pelagian or semi-Pelagian view and that of Luther and the Confessions. While we are justified by God's grace, we remain at the same time sinners as long as we live. Just as a married couple encounters difficulties, faith encounters its temptations. At those times we resist the Word and try to go our own way again, satisfying ourselves.

The certainty of faith is that God speaks his Word into the midst of this temptation. And as this Word creates faith, it also renews and strengthens it.

Thus faith is and always remains a gift of God, created and kept by his Word. He creates the response he wants in us, so that we can respond to him in service.

Teaching options

If you prefer to teach by lecture, you shouldn't have any trouble pulling enough material out of Dr. Anderson's chapter and the background section to keep you going for the full hour. In fact, you will probably have just the opposite problem: having too much to pack in.

One way to get around this, simplify matters, and set up discussion all at the same time would be to use a distinction suggested by Robert W. Jenson. It is not possible here or in your class to take it to the depth he does in the opening chapter of *Lutheranism: The Theological Movement and Its Confessional Writings*. But it would be a helpful way to get things moving.

Jenson distinguishes between what he calls "if/then" kinds of words and "because/therefore" words. If/then words are conditional. You must fulfill the "if," the condition, before you can obtain the "then." For example, "If you want these shoes, then you must pay \$30." Or "If you want to go out tonight, you'd better clean up your room."

The world runs on if/then words, stated and unstated. We are always filling conditions—in jobs, hobbies, relationships with other people, even in friendships. These conditions require something from us, throwing us back on ourselves. And as the condition is fulfilled we receive what we want, whether it is as open as an out and out trade or as subtle as being the kind of person people want us to be (a condition) so that we are desirable friends (the payoff).

But there are also because/therefore words and relationships. Here no condition is attached. Because you love your husband or wife, son or daughter, or a close friend, you give that person something. Because someone loves you, he or she does something for you, perhaps not even wanting any kind of recognition. Because/therefore is the language of love, of gifts. It is unconditional, as unconditional as anything can be in a world of sin and death.

Pelagians and semi-Pelagians take the gospel as an if/then kind of word, either openly or subtly attaching a condition to it. "If you believe, if you are really sincere, if you really want it, then God will give you his gifts."

As Luther and the Confessions understand it, the gospel has no such condition attached. It is a because/therefore kind of Word, a simple gift of God. The phrase "justification by faith" and Dr. An-

dereson's sentence, "God justifies, freely, because of Christ through faith," are intended to state this as clearly as possible.

It is God who takes the action to establish his relationship with us, and he takes all the action. He himself fulfills all of the conditions in Christ, as our Creator, and through the Holy Spirit. There is not the tiniest "if" remaining, "for if justification were through the law, then Christ died to no purpose" (Gal. 2:21).

Everything else in Dr. Anderson's discussion in Chapter 3, in the background material provided here, and in the Confessions themselves is intended to declare, support, and maintain this one point. In laying it out this way you can get right to the heart of it and then expand it as you have time.

If you prefer to teach by discussion, you might want to set out the distinction between if/then and because/therefore words as a way of summing things up. Lay stress on the unconditional nature of the gospel and then watch the discussion take off. Here is where our rebellion comes out, for we desperately want to make the gospel a conditional word, as Dr. Anderson said in the second chapter. And that rebellion will come out in all kinds of questions and arguments.

If for some reason this doesn't provoke discussion, you might want to take it a step further and talk about some of the ways in which people try to attach a condition to the promise. For example, one of the most popular and well known is the frequently heard emphasis on making a decision for Jesus. "Baptism isn't enough," it is said, "you have to decide for Christ and demonstrate a sincere desire for amendment of life." That little word "enough," is the tip-off that there is rebelliousness afoot. God doesn't do his work halfway, leaving it unfinished so that we have to fill in an "enough" afterward.

A couple of things are crucial in such discussions. First of all, be prepared with good strong scriptural support—not just one or two passages, but several: John 3:16; Romans 3-5, 8-9; Gal. 2:11-21; Philippians 3, and so forth. You could go through these passages looking for "ifs" and "thens," stated or implied, or "because" and "therefores." For example, "for (or because) God so loved the world (therefore), he gave his only begotten Son. . . ."

If you do this, someone is bound to pipe up, "Yes, 'that whoever believes. . . .'" and try to push this as a condition. If that happens, refer them to John 1:12-13 and the story of Nicodemus preceding

John 3:16, where it is made clear that we can't believe by our own strength or effort.

This is often the best way to handle such questions. One pastor who had a long argument with a woman about infant baptism once told her simply to diagram the passages that speak of Baptism—Romans 6, Titus 3, and so forth—underlining the subjects of the sentences in one color, the verbs in another, and the direct objects in a third. By the time the lady was done with the assignment, the pastor's argument was won. The subject or actor is always God and the direct object, the one who receives the action, is always us.

A second thing to watch in the discussion is the personal pronouns. The gospel is always a personal Word, a Word for me, for you, for us. People who want to attach a condition to the gospel most always want to talk in the third person, about "he" or "she" or "they" or "them." If they get by with this shift, you've lost the point. Drive them back to their own ground. "We're not talking about other people here. We're talking about ourselves, about you. Have you fulfilled the condition? Have you made the decision? How do you know? How can you be sure?"

The distinction that Dr. Anderson makes at the beginning is very helpful along this line, too: *coram hominibus* and *coram Deo*, before people and before God. Conditions work as long as we can compare ourselves with other people. But God doesn't grade on the curve. When the conditions we generally apply to others are put in this perspective, they become pretty uncomfortable.

Third, it is crucial to recognize what is at stake in discussions like these. Trying to attach conditions to the gospel isn't just an academic or intellectual exercise, it is our deep-seated rebellion against God. The only cure for that rebellion is the gospel itself. We will not finally be cured of it until we die and are raised. Consequently, these kinds of arguments can only be met effectively with the gospel. If someone persists with adding conditions, keep telling the unconditional Word: "Yes, but it is for you—God has decided that *you* are going to be one of his people and he's not going to let you go, even if you think you have to do something for him first."

Questions for discussion

1. As the text indicates, justification is a courtroom word, conveying a picture of a judge declaring an accused person "not

guilty." Dr. Anderson lists several other words that are used in speaking of how God establishes his relationship with us. How do these words convey the message that the gospel is an unconditional gift? Are there other words that do the same job?

2. What is the difference between declaratory justification and justification that brings an inner change? What difference does it make to you when these different concepts of justification are used? How does recognizing the power of the Word help to resolve the difference?

3. How does this chapter relate to the book's title, *Faith and Freedom*? What does justification by faith have to do with freedom? What kind of freedom is it?

4. What is grace?

5. What difference does it make in your life whether you judge yourself "before men" or "before God"?

6. Which of the ways of speaking of God's actions listed by Dr. Anderson (pp. 40-41) is most helpful to you? Why?

7. What does justification by faith mean to you? Do you think we should avoid using the term today? Why?

8. Can you identify anyone today who teaches a Pelagian view?

9. What is the difference whether you say "through faith" or "because of" faith (p. 50)?

As you go into discussion, be prepared for some sticky questions. One of them we have already discussed: But don't we have to do something? This is the question that usually tips off an attempt to attach a condition. There are a number of other questions like this: Who will bother to be good if God does it all? Does this mean that God saves some and damns others? Doesn't this mean universalism? Isn't this predestination?

Dr. Gerhard Forde, professor at Luther Theological Seminary, St. Paul, often refers to these as the "old Adam's death throes questions." Luther called them "fiery darts of the devil."

For instance, the question, "Who will be good if God does it all?" assumes that people will be good only if they are under the law, and that we create our own goodness by the law, without God. Such assumptions have to be challenged right away. If you start to answer the question without challenging its assumptions, you wind up comparing people's goodness, and the battle is lost. We then start rendering judgments that only God can render. The best way

to answer is simply to say that God will decide who is good and he will make people good as he sees fit.

In general, the only way to handle such questions is to point to what we can know and what we can't know of God's working. He has made known to us through his Word his promise to justify by faith. But he has not given us a peek at his inner workings. Consequently, hard as it might be, there are some questions that we just have to live with. By answering in this way you proclaim the unconditional promise without getting caught up in a deadly game of speculation.

3 The source of justification

Objectives

1. To discuss the basis for our justification in the work of God as our Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier.
2. To explain how we know God as the one who creates, redeems, and sanctifies.
3. To review what God does for us as he creates, redeems, and sanctifies.

Basis in “Faith and Freedom”

Chapter 4—“The Source of Justification”

Background

Sometimes unbelievers have an advantage over those who are more familiar with the Christian faith. At least, it seems easier for some of them to recognize how tremendous—almost preposterous—some of the claims that we often take for granted really are.

So far in *Faith and Freedom* and the pages of this guide, it has been said that God—the Creator of all that is and ever will be, who brought the world out of nothing and holds the reins to its end—enters into a relationship with us. That’s not bad for a start. Even more, it has been insisted that God establishes this relationship himself without conditions, giving himself freely to make us his own.

The question that begs to be asked, given the significance of statements like these, is, How do you know? How is it possible to know that the Creator of the universe enters into relationship with us as a loving Father, freely making us his own?

Like the questions discussed at the end of the last chapter, this is a troublesome one. It is an elegant and tantalizing invitation to speculate, to use our own mental resources to try to show how these

great claims can be true. But if we do that, then like the fox that chewed off three of its legs before it found the one in the trap, we discover that there is nothing left to run on.

As Dr. Anderson points out in Chapter 3 of *Faith and Freedom*, there are basically two ways to speak of knowing God. The first is by using our natural resources, principally our reason, to observe ourselves and the world around us, and trying on that basis to find the God behind it all. The second is God's way. It is not something we do. Rather, God makes himself known to us.

The first way is the generally accepted method, not only among philosophers and the academically trained, but with ordinary people as well. A philosopher like Plato, for example, argued that there is something universal and undying in each of us. The way to knowledge of God, he said, is to find these universal and undying essences in the people and things around us, and from them use our reason to find God.

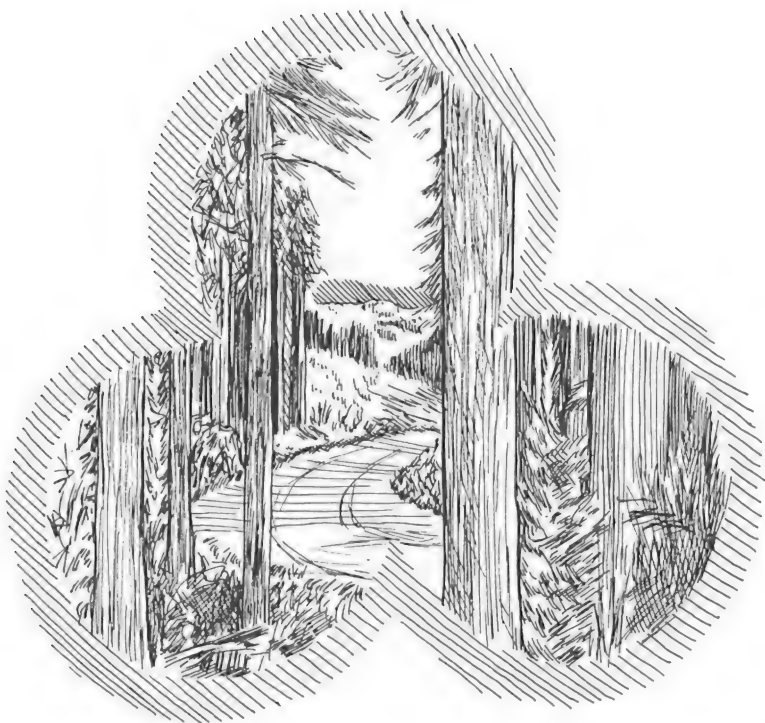
But a person doesn't have to be a Plato to use the same kind of approach. People who speak of communing with God on the golf course, from the business end of a fishing rod, or at sunsets follow the same kind of reasoning. In fact, so do pious people who speak of how lost they were until they "found God."

Whether sophisticated or unsophisticated, such approaches are based on the notion that God is passive, hidden away somewhere as a kind of detached observer of the world, and that it is our business to actively pursue him. The names used for God in this kind of approach give it away—they are cold and impersonal: unmoved mover, first cause, supreme being, and so forth.

Early in the Reformation Luther attacked the assumption underlying this approach—the arrogance of claiming that we can know God on our own: "The person does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon the invisible things of God as though they were clearly perceptible in those things which have actually happened."

Why did he say this? The reason is that people who think they can find God on their own assume power over God. The implication is that God has nothing better to do than to sit off in the distance playing mental games of hide and seek with intellectuals or arranging moving moments for weary weekenders.

This approach is a works righteousness of the mind. Just as some think they can move toward God by doing good works, so we may



also try to move toward him with good thoughts—"finding him" so that we can get whatever he may have to give.

Luther didn't deny that we might learn something about God in this way, as Dr. Anderson points out. We may learn that God creates and judges, gives and takes away, and so forth. But as Dr. Anderson says, Luther and the Confessions regard the knowledge of God obtained in this way as ambiguous, uncertain, fragmentary, and finally intolerable. It is almost always abused, loaded with our own presumption.

In contrast to this first way, then, Luther and the Confessions—like countless Christians before and after—hold that we can only know of God insofar as he makes himself known to us. He does not wait for us to find him—he finds us. He does not wait, like a shy bachelor uncle, for us to get acquainted with him. He makes our acquaintance, letting us in on what he has in mind for us.

The heart of God's self-revelation to us is the cross. Thus Luther's comment, "He deserves to be called a theologian, however, who

comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross." Here, in the death and resurrection of Jesus, we learn what kind of God he is: a God who never rests, who is always active, ceaselessly at work, giving himself, raising the dead, creating out of nothing, bringing in the future. He is, as Luther called him, "a red hot oven full of love."

People who try to find God often speak of him passively, but Luther and the Confessions speak of God in active verbs—action words. One of Luther's favorite stories in this regard was the account of Moses asking for God's name (Exodus 3). When Moses first asked, God replied with a mysterious name: "I am who I am," or "I will be who I will be." God also said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' . . ."

It is as if God said, "I'm not going to tell you what I am like, but I will tell you what I do. I am the God who called Abraham out of the desert, who formed Isaac in Sarah's old and barren womb, who wrestled with Jacob." Luther concluded from this account, others like it in Scripture, and especially from the cross and the resurrection that we cannot know God as he is in his nature. We can only know him from what he does.

This shift from God's being to his doing is crucial for Lutheran thinking about God. Luther and the Confessions are anti-speculative. They not only have little time for people who try to pry into God's hidden secrets—they repeatedly attack the notion that we can discover them. The Confessions aren't interested in theories, abstract descriptions, concepts, and ideas about God. Instead, they want to talk about the living God, the down to earth God who sent his Son to death on the cross and then also raised him from the dead.

This turnabout comes with special force in one of the most beautiful parts of the Confessions, Luther's explanations of the Creed in the Large Catechism. In none of the three articles does Luther waste a minute speculating or chasing down abstract definitions. Instead, he zeros right in on the verbs. God is the one who creates as our Father, redeems as our Lord, and sanctifies as the Holy Spirit.

In each of the articles, also, Luther repeatedly emphasizes the completeness of God's action. There is nothing halfway or incomplete about God's work. He does it all, to the end. As the Creator he creates all things—not only the land and the seeds, but the favor-

able weather needed to bring the crops to maturity. As our Lord, he gives himself completely, withholding nothing, emptying himself for us in the cross and death. As the Holy Spirit, the Sanctifier, he not only invites, but through his Word gathers us together with other Christians, enlightens us, and gives and keeps us in faith. He leaves nothing undone.

But if we answer the initial question, "How do we know that God does all these things?" by saying that God has revealed himself to us in this way, have we solved the problem of presumption? Isn't saying that we can't know God on our own but that God makes himself known to us still a terribly presumptuous claim? Have we simply replaced one presumption, that we can get hold of God, with another?

There is no doubt that this is a large claim. But it does have a basis: the cross and the resurrection. If asked how you know God is like this, you can reply, "He gave himself for us on the cross, he raised Jesus from the dead, he is giving us new life and freedom." You can take it further: "This is how God has revealed himself to us in the Word of Scripture."

But what happens if someone says, "Yes, but how do you know that the cross and the resurrection mean that? How do you know that the Bible is telling the truth about this whole business?" Are you cornered?

If you try to argue, spelling out other reasons for believing this besides the cross and the resurrection, besides the Word itself, you may very well get caught in the same speculative ball park that the first method leads to. What then should you do?

It is the nature of faith to be in this kind of a quandary, for faith is not sight, as Paul repeatedly said. God has not made himself known to us in such a way that we can take hold of him and force others to submit. He does not offer a credit rating to detached observers.

But what has God made known? He has promised that faith comes by hearing (Rom. 10:17), that "through the folly of what we preach," he saves those who believe (1 Cor. 1:21). If pressed, all a person can do is proclaim that Word of promise again in the confidence that "the Holy Spirit produces faith, where and when it pleases God, in those who hear the Gospel," as Article V of the Augustana says. The only reply to questions like these is the gospel itself.

Teaching options

As in the last session, there is plenty here for a lecture. But unlike the last session, there is a more ready-made focus: the turnabout from the God we find to the God who finds us, making himself known in the cross and the resurrection.

A good way to approach this, and to get a little variety into your teaching at the same time, would be to take off from Luther's definition of what it means to have a God in the explanation of the First Commandment in the Large Catechism.

Dr. Anderson quotes a portion of this passage on p. 55 of Chapter 4. The full quotation is on p. 365 of Tappert's edition of the Book of Concord:

A god is that to which we look for all good and in which we find refuge in every time of need. To have a god is nothing else than to trust and believe him with our whole heart. As I have often said, the trust and faith of the heart alone make both God and an idol. If your faith and trust are right, then your God is the true God. On the other hand, if your trust is false and wrong, you have not the true God. For these two belong together, faith and God. That to which your heart clings and entrusts itself is, I say, really your God.

Dr. Anderson names the example that Luther uses, money, and several others: power, position, economics, education. How does it work? As Luther explains it, it is both deceptively simple and simply powerful. A man who has money, for instance, may rely on it—looking to his money for help in every time of need, depending on it for every good. He fears his money, not in the sense that he is afraid of it, but in the sense that he respects its power more than anything else. He loves his money, proudly thinking of what it can do for him. And he trusts his money, sure that as long as he has it, nothing can harm him. Other examples work the same way. A woman may fear, love, and trust her beauty or her education; a youth may fear, love, and trust his ability to talk his way past anyone who questions him.

Luther concludes his point by saying,

So, too, if anyone boasts of great learning, wisdom, power, prestige, family, and honor, and trusts in them, he also has a god, but not the one, true God. Notice, again, how presumptuous, secure, and proud people become because of such possessions,

and how despondent when they lack them or are deprived of them. Therefore, I repeat, to have a God properly means to have something in which the heart trusts completely. (Tappert, p. 366.)

If you lay out this analysis at the beginning of the session, you can let the class take over in the discussion, picking up examples of how this works with different kinds of things. Once a person gets the hang of it, it is fascinating to see how it works. "The heart is an idol factory," as Luther once said—we are constantly in the business of looking for props, things to help make us feel secure.

When an analysis of idolatry has been completed in the discussion, you can take it a step further: What happens, then, when we try to find God? Is our judgment, our reason, reliable here? What kind of God do we find when we go looking for him?

Then move into the turnabout from our finding God to God's finding us. Some Bible passages that would be particularly helpful in supporting this discussion are Exod. 3:13-16, the story of Moses' request for God's name; Isaiah 46, where Isaiah compares the God of Israel, who carries his people, with the idols of Babylonia who have to be carried; and 1 Cor. 1:18-29, where Paul speaks of how God reveals himself to us through the cross.

A question that comes up often when this turnabout is discussed concerns the use of reason and our mental capacities. As mentioned earlier, Luther and the Confessions are anti-speculative. Some people take this to mean that they are anti-reason, that the gift of reason which God has given to us is being demeaned.

Luther made a distinction when he spoke of reason. When it is used to try to get hold of God and bring him under our control, Luther called reason "an old whore." But when it is used properly, to serve God and our neighbors, Luther called it the highest gift of creation. So in the original version of the Small Catechism, among the gifts that God has given each of us Luther listed "my reason and all the faculties of my mind." His argument is not against reason, but against its abuse.

Another option for getting into the lecture or discussion in this session would be to pick up Dr. Anderson's criticism of Lutherans for concentrating too much on the Second Article. Leveled more at current Lutherans than at Luther and the Confessions, his point is that we talk so much about Christ's work in justifying that we never get around to the First and Third Articles.

There may be some justice to the charge, particularly where the emphasis is on making a decision for Jesus. If the object is to convert people every week, there isn't much time to talk about the gifts of creation and our role in it. Nor is there much need to talk about the work of the Holy Spirit—if we can create faith in ourselves, the Spirit doesn't have much purpose.

As Dr. Anderson points out, the Second Article is the starting point for the Confessions. But it is not the finish line. Hearing the Word that we are justified freely by God, because of Christ, through faith, we are brought to know God both as Creator and as Sanctifier as well.

We can then recognize what is going on in the creation: through all the different jobs we do as husbands, wives, uncles, aunts, farmers, preachers, teachers, clerks, and so on, God is at work making sure that his creation is ordered and cared for. And we can then use the gift of reason for its proper purpose, to contribute to the general welfare in whatever role we have.

At the same time, when we hear the Word of Christ, we can also recognize what is going on in our own lives. What faith we have has been nurtured and maintained by the Spirit from the beginning. It began in a Word spoken by parents, family, or friends, and has been maintained as that Word has been spoken to us again and again.

By spelling out these connections between the Second Article and the other two, you can open up the discussion to the wider concerns of the chapter and then zero in where class members have questions.

Questions for discussion

1. What is idolatry? What is the difference between true and false faith?
2. If the heart of God's self-revelation is the cross and the resurrection, how does God make himself known to us now? What does the Holy Spirit have to do with this?
3. In reference to Luther's explanation of the First Article in the Small Catechism, how does God give us everything we need to live from day to day and guard and protect us from every evil? What does this have to do with thanking, serving, praising and obeying him?
4. How does the Holy Spirit call, gather, enlighten, sanctify, and

keep (see Article V of the Augustana)? What does this have to do with our telling of the Word?

5. What does this chapter have to say about "faith and freedom?" How does the faith that God makes himself known to us free us?

6. How would you respond to a person who claims not to believe in God?

The questions that come up in discussion this week shouldn't be as troublesome as in the last session—with the possible exception of the one already mentioned and any that are left hanging around from last time. There are more coming next week, though.

The important thing in handling these questions is not to get driven from proclamation to speculation. That is always the temptation—the trap Satan tried to spring on Jesus when he was tempted in the wilderness. Satan wanted Jesus to prove himself. Jesus steadfastly refused, replying three times, "It is written. . . ." Speculation, trying to explain and defend, is always weak, whereas proclamation—declaring the word of the gospel—is always strong, even when it appears to be just the opposite.

4 The need for justification

Objectives

1. To examine the Confessions' understanding of the need for justification and our sin.
2. To explain that sin is not only an act but a condition which grips and holds us.
3. To explore what this understanding of sin does to our understanding of freedom.

Basis in "Faith and Freedom"

Chapter 5—"The Need for Justification"

Background

As we move into this chapter on sin, we have to take a look at a question you may have wondered about at the beginning: Why this sequence of chapter topics? Usually Lutherans talk about sin first and then go on to justification. Here we have had a chapter on justification and one on its source, and only now is sin discussed. Why this order?

There is at least one tactical reason for this. By organizing his treatment in this way, Dr. Anderson has been able to get right to the meat of the matter without getting stalled in the preliminaries. Since everything in the Confessions revolves around justification, there is good reason to go into it first.

There is another consideration here too, one which is not always recognized. It is certainly true that when we are enabled to recognize the power of sin, we also discover our need for the Savior. If this need isn't recognized, the promise of the gospel doesn't make much sense.

But the sequence can work the other way, too. Hearing of the work of the Savior for us, we may then be enabled to recognize a

need that we weren't aware of beforehand. To give a slightly different example, after being married for awhile people will often comment, "I don't know how I lived without her (or him)." Looking back, the love received in marriage illumines the condition that went before it.

This approach has an advantage, too. As Lutherans, we have often been tempted to engage in what one professor calls "theological name calling"—to try to prove the need for Christ by running humanity in the mud. This often backfires when the emphasis on sin so puts people off that they can't hear the gift of Christ. The power of sin is offensive—there is no getting around it. But when we hear of the work of Christ for us and realize that there is a cure for sin, we can recognize what we may have refused to admit before knowing of Christ's gifts—just how radical the disease is.

Further, as Dr. Anderson points out, we are generally aware of our condition as people even before someone tells us that we are sinners. It is an imperfect knowledge and a knowledge that we may try to deny. But we know there is something wrong.

This chapter points out a critical distinction that helps pull things together. Dr. Anderson refers to it on page 94 when he speaks of everyone having "some liberty to choose to obey the civil law and do the works which reason directs."

In their treatment of the Commandments, Luther and Melancthon divided them into two tables. The first table, commandments one through three, speak of our relationship with God: that we should have no other gods, use God's name properly, and gladly hear and learn his Word. The other seven commandments, the second table, speak of our relationships with our neighbors. They begin with our most immediate neighbors, our parents, and then move on to protect all that we and our neighbors need to live together peacefully: life, companionship, property, good names, and freedom from evil schemes and trickery.

When they speak of sin, Luther and Melancthon use the same distinction. The commandments that expose all the trouble are the first three—especially the first. Throughout the Confessions, it is repeatedly emphasized that we are incapable of truly fearing, loving, and trusting God above all things.

But in the second table, as Dr. Anderson says, we do have "some liberty to choose . . .", some freedom. We can refrain from killing, for instance, and go beyond restraint to help our neighbors in var-

ious ways. We are not compelled to commit adultery, to steal, or bear false witness.

To use Melanchthon's term, by nature we as people are capable of "civil righteousness"—of living an outwardly honorable and decent life before our neighbors. This capability is always in jeopardy, however. It is weak and can easily be destroyed by sin.

When the standard of comparison is no longer our neighbor's behavior, when we stand *coram Deo*, before God, the flaws in our civil righteousness are rapidly exposed. But civil righteousness is not only a possibility but an actuality. People make great contributions to their communities, doing all kinds of good things for others.

While it is important to recognize this civil righteousness and even to praise it, as Melanchthon says in the Apology, it is equally important if not more so to see the radical power of sin as it is exposed by the first table. Sin, as the Confessions see it, is not just an act like looking too long at a neighbor's wife or husband or drinking too much on occasion. In fact, Luther could jokingly refer to these as "puppy sins."

Rather than simply being something people do or even fail to do, sin is a radical condition placing us in enmity with God. In sin, we do not want God to be God but wish to be gods ourselves—to get our hands on the future and control it for ourselves, shaping it to suit our hopes and needs. We do not want gifts or want to be dependent on God to care for us. Rather, we want to have things our way, to be as independent as possible of both God and our neighbors.

This is the idolatry of the heart, as we discussed it in the last session. And it comes out, above all, in matters of religion. Having heard the promise that God justifies, freely, because of Christ, through faith, doing everything necessary for us, we still want to have something that we can point to in ourselves—some piety, some dedication, some power that we can regard as making us acceptable to God.

That's our rebellion. Like Adam and Eve, we want to be as wise as God, to live forever, and to do so—as far as possible—without God's help or aid.

Working from passages like Genesis 1–3 and Paul's discussions of sin, the Confessions insist that this sin is a power which grips and holds us, over which we have no control. It is bondage in which we

are born and live until we die, being freed from it only as we are raised from the dead in Christ.

Despair and grief are examples of how this bondage works. Neither one of them is something people set out to do. Rather, people try to avoid them if at all possible. In fact, what makes despair and grief so difficult is the notion that somehow we ought to be able to control them. Then despair and grief feed on themselves, pulling a person into a vicious circle.

For instance, at a time of death a person might say, "I don't have to grieve as others do who have no hope. I am a Christian." And then, as grief wells up, it doubles itself—there is not only grief for the loved one who has died, but grief about grieving.

The same thing happens in despair. A person says, "I shouldn't despair this way. I should be able to get out of it." And the original despair is compounded by despair about despairing. It is a frightening circle, all of it opening up in the face of God's promise to raise us from the dead, to take our burdens upon himself.

The whole circle is fueled and run by the power of sin—self-centeredness, being curved in upon ourselves. Our love for ourselves, along with the love for the one who has died, is what brings grief. Our love for ourselves, springing out in fears and worries about the future, causes despair. And the more we worry about it, the worse it becomes.

Combined with this emphasis on the bondage and power of sin, the Confessions have a different understanding of freedom than is common to us. We usually think of freedom as freedom *for* the self, being able to do what we want to do, when and where we want.

As the Confessions see it, this is an illusory kind of freedom and thus not freedom at all, but more bondage. A person may feel free and even convince himself or herself that it is real freedom to do as he or she pleases. But this kind of freedom can be had only by ignoring God. Finally, it ends in destruction—emptiness, loneliness, despair, and death.

Rather than freedom *for* the self, the Confessions understand genuine freedom as freedom *from* the self. It is a break, a new beginning where self-centered self-serving is no longer the controlling factor in life. It is the freedom to love God, not only for what he may give, but for himself—his sheer goodness. It is the freedom to treat a neighbor as a neighbor, not as someone who may threaten

or may help, but as someone who is a genuine person. It is the freedom to see the earth as God's creation and thus as something we can love and care for. Rather than throwing a person into a closed circle, this freedom opens things up. It is genuine freedom.

But is this kind of freedom a possibility for us? If sin is bondage, a condition in which we are gripped and held, how is this freedom from the self ever going to come? The response to this is the gospel. God justifies freely, because of Christ, through faith to bring us into this freedom.

He frees us from ourselves by giving himself for us, by promising that he will take care of us, and by forgiving us our rebellion against him. In the cross he absorbed our rebellion, taking it into himself, bearing it in his body. And now, in the Word of the cross, he brings the rebellion to an end—declaring his love for us, freeing us from our self-appointed pursuits and ends.

But this is not a freedom that we possess. As Roy Harrisville, professor at Luther Theological Seminary, has said, "The gospel is a declaration of war against the self." The warfare takes place in each one of us. Set free by this Word in Christ, we nevertheless fight with a self-centeredness which always seeks to return.

But we don't fight alone. As we hear the Word, God himself does battle with our sinful self—putting it to death to raise us as new people. And when our end comes, when we die, then the sinful self will be completely destroyed and we will be wholly and completely new—released from ourselves, from this daily battle, into what Paul calls "the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Rom. 8:21).

Teaching options

This time you've got a tiger by the tail. This understanding of bondage and freedom, as found in Scripture and the Confessions, is so different from our usual assumptions that it almost always brings controversy.

The issue can be stated briefly: the freedom that people generally claim for themselves by virtue of creation is a freedom that Scripture and the Confessions see as coming only in Christ. It is, thus, not freedom *for* the self but freedom *from* ourselves.

The key words in this description of the issue are *by virtue of creation* and *in Christ*. We like to imagine that, as we are, with no

help from Christ and the gospel, we have the power to set ourselves free. Thus people often speak of having a "free will," the power to choose whether or not Christ will have a place in their life.

As Dr. Anderson indicates, the Confessions speak of a free will which existed before the fall. But in Luther's words, "after the fall, free will exists in name only." The power of sin has taken away our freedom, the freedom that we had by creation, and replaced it with bondage. And our every attempt to show that we are free apart from Christ, that we can make it on our own, simply confirms the bondage—showing that we fear, love, and trust ourselves and what we can get our hands on, rather than Christ.

It is only as Christ takes hold of us and gives us the new birth that freedom comes. It is his gift, his work in us, his releasing us from the power of sin and placing us under his power. Instead of being ruled by sin, we are ruled by Christ—even though the battle continues to rage within us.

There are a couple of ways to get at this understanding of bondage and freedom. But first it is important to clear the decks on any misunderstandings.

Two distinctions will help you to do this, both already discussed. The first is the distinction between the two tables of the law, the two parts of the Ten Commandments. When the Confessions talk about the bondage and power of sin, they are particularly concerned with the first table—our enmity towards God.

Second, as Dr. Anderson points out on p. 94, the Confessions distinguish between what is above us and what is below us. It is above ourselves, in relation to God and his word, that we encounter the bondage. Below ourselves, "in what reason can comprehend," we still have some freedom of the will. Article XIIX of the Augstana mentions several examples of this freedom, as does Article XIIX of the Apology.

Having cleared up some possible misconceptions with these distinctions, you can then move into some examples of how this bondage and freedom operates.

One of the best examples of bondage is alcoholism. An alcoholic's chief illusion is always that he or she is free and can quit drinking at any time, without help. This illusion fuels the drinking in a double way, giving the alcoholic a false sense of security, and provoking more drinking as it starts to break down. Then an alcoholic drinks to avoid the realization that he or she is hooked on the

bottle. It is an illusionary freedom, a vicious circle. True freedom only begins when the alcoholic can admit, as in the first of the 12 steps of AA, that he or she is "powerless over alcohol."

There are all kinds of examples of illusory versus genuine freedom. One is a child's conflict with its parents. It doesn't take long before the child is asserting some independence, if only by hollering incoherently. Without knowing the first thing about freedom, the child may, for instance, think that it is free when it can leave something unliked on the plate without eating it. But it is an illusory freedom, purchased with bad nutrition that left unchecked



will do damage. True freedom for the child comes when it freely accepts the love and care of the parents.

Another example is courtship. A boy may imagine that he is free because he is uncommitted and can "play the field." But the illusion of freedom is purchased with isolation, loneliness, or restless hunting; real freedom only comes as a commitment is made. Or a girl may imagine that she is free because all of the social restraints have been loosened, only to discover that her supposed freedom is a continuing search for something better with someone else.

Another example, perhaps the most telling one, is in family lifestyles. In order to support the illusion that we have genuine freedom and can maintain it by ourselves, we have to take freedom at the expense of those who limit the illusion. Thus, for example, there has to be freedom to abort unplanned babies; the poor, the weak, the maimed, the retarded, and the insane have to be kept as far from our communities as possible (watch what happens when a home for the retarded is planned for a suburb); and the elderly, regardless of whether they need more care than a family can give, have to be relegated to nursing homes where they most often sit alone, awaiting death. The illusion can only be purchased with destruction.

Reversing it doesn't necessarily guarantee freedom. Carrying out an unplanned pregnancy, living with a retarded or otherwise handicapped person who can get along with skilled care, and caring for elderly people can all be very demeaning and limiting. But as they pull us away from ourselves, they can also add some tremendous new dimensions in exchange. The elderly, for instance, can teach something that a lot of people are now going to seminars to learn—about preparing for death and dying. In their own limits, they give a freedom that is precious.

By zeroing in on such examples, you can focus both your own presentation and the discussion on bondage and freedom, and thus get a broader look at the Confessions' whole conception of the need for justification.

It would be helpful if you would get an AA member to sit in on the discussion, to speak a little bit from experience. These people have a tremendous contribution to make, having learned the hard way what the Confessions are talking about in discussing bondage and freedom.

Questions for discussion

1. If sin is both an act (something we do) and a condition (something we have or are gripped by), what is the relation between the act and the condition? A good analogy is a disease and the symptoms.

2. If there is such a thing as civil righteousness, can an unbeliever do good for his or her neighbor? Discuss some examples. Could a Communist, for instance, do something worthwhile for his neighbors? What are the strengths of civil righteousness? Its weaknesses?

3. How can sin be something that we can't help and something that we are at the same time responsible for? (Alcoholism is a good example here.)

4. How does this chapter relate to the title, *Faith and Freedom*? How do faith and freedom go together?

5. Should Christians be optimistic or pessimistic about the future of the world? Why?

6. How would you define *sin*?

7. What do you understand by *original sin*?

8. To demonstrate the gradual binding nature of sin, have class members try the experiment of tying hands together suggested on p. 84 of *Faith and Freedom*.

Again in this session you'll have to keep a close eye on the questions for discussion. Because this emphasis on sin as a condition of bondage has frequently been ignored, people are often shocked when they hear that Luther and the Confessions attack the notion of free will. Thus you will get questions like: What's the difference between us and the animals, then? Are we just robots?

On the first question, the difference between us and the animals is that we can hear the Word of God and tell it. It is hearing the Word that makes us human, releasing us from an inhuman bondage into the freedom God has in store for his creatures. As Luther said, knowing the promise of the gospel, who would want free will even if there were such a thing?

The second question goes hand in hand with the discussion of bondage and responsibility—the fact that we are both bound to sin and responsible for our sin. We are not forced to sin, or compelled by some external push. We are in bondage through our love for things other than God. Under the power of alcoholism a person may be driven to drink. But what drives is the love of the bottle. We are not robots, but are seduced by our loves.

5 The means of justification

Objectives

1. To discuss the means through which God works to accomplish his purposes for his creation and his people.
2. To emphasize the importance of distinguishing between the law and the gospel.
3. To discuss what happens in the proclamation of the Word and the administration of the sacraments.

Basis in “Faith and Freedom”

Chapter 6—“The Means of Justification”

Background

This chapter carries a big load—several of the most distinctive features of Lutheranism are discussed. Thus once again there is a problem of focusing. To meet it, two questions can be asked: What is God doing? And what means does he use to do it?

The first question has already been answered: God is justifying freely, because of Christ through faith. God is reclaiming his creation for himself. He is making his earth and his people what he intended in the beginning, restoring us to our original purpose, bringing in a “new heaven and a new earth,” as the author of Revelation puts it.

This broader context of justification, the purpose God has in mind as he justifies, isn’t always considered. But it appears all through the New Testament—1 Cor. 15:20-28 is just one example. This is an important consideration to Luther and the Confessions, also. It is what stands behind the distinction between the law and the gospel.

As much as he loves each one of us, justifying us isn’t the end of God’s purpose. As much as he loves the church, caring for it

isn't the end of his purpose, either. Rather, as individuals and as members of his body, the church, we are steps along the way—or to put it in biblical language, we are “the first fruits of the new creation.”

What God is after is the whole creation. He wants to establish his rule over all, defeating every “principality,” “power,” or “rule” which, like sin and death, run counter to his purposes. And he is at work to do just that as he justifies us.

It is this promise that Jesus proclaimed as he came out of the desert preaching, “. . . the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:14-15). It is this same promise that Paul is speaking of when he says that at the end, Christ will deliver “the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power” (1 Cor. 15:24). And it is the same thing John heard Christ saying: “Behold, I make all things new” (Rev. 21:5).

The law and the gospel, as Dr. Anderson discusses them, are two different ways God works to accomplish his purposes for creation. Luther and the Confessions speak of the law as God's “strange work.” Because the whole creation hasn't yet heard the gospel and we who have continue to fight against it, God does some things that are strange in the sense that they aren't like him—he would prefer not to do them. Just as a parent would prefer not to resort to rules and punishments, but does so to keep order and drive rebellious children back to his or her love, so God uses the law. With it, he keeps the world in order for his promise (first use) and drives us to his promise (second use).

The law, then, is a temporary measure—a schoolmaster or baby-sitter, as Paul speaks of it in Galatians—given until the gospel comes. And it is a whip or a goad doing the kinds of things Paul describes in Romans 7, exposing our unrighteousness and driving us to Christ.

God uses the gospel—the good news that he justifies freely, because of Christ through faith—for a different purpose. With this joyous Word he releases us from the bondage of his enemies—sin, death, and the devil—and creates new hearts within us. With the gospel, he rules over us not by force of law but by force of love, turning us loose in the happy freedom of children.

So while the law is temporary, the gospel is eternal. The law passes away as the gospel comes. And in the end, when the old

creation is gone and the new creation has come forever, there will be no more law but only gospel:

Behold, the dwelling place of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying, nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away (Rev. 21:3-4).

To use the analogy of the parent again (with no reference to transactional analysis), the parent uses rules and punishments tem-



porarily—always looking forward to the time when rules and punishments are no longer needed and the children freely hear the word of love.

If the law is “strange work,” the gospel is “proper work,” the work which God intends or wants to do. He has made his wants and intentions known in Christ.

God is at work in both the law and the gospel to accomplish his purposes for us and his creation. As the Holy Spirit, he does this work indirectly. He doesn't come right out in the open and deal with us face to face, but works through means—bringing home the law and the gospel through the Word which is proclaimed to us and the sacraments which are administered to us by other people.

Two things are important here. First, the Confessions consider it absolutely crucial that even though the Word and sacraments are proclaimed and administered by people, they are God's act. A preacher may be the one who stands in the pulpit and preaches, but it is God who works in the Word insofar as the preacher proclaims Christ. A preacher may be the one who baptizes and administers the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, but it is God who is at work in both. Baptism is not the preacher's baptism or the individual's but God's. And the Supper is not the pastor's supper or the church's supper but the Lord's Supper.

This promise, that God works through these means, often gets lost in discussions of the Word and sacraments, especially in relation to the sacraments. For that reason it has to be underscored as a gracious promise.

God is at work in the Word of Christ we hear from our preachers. Not only that, he is at work in the Word of Christ that we hear from our neighbors—“where two or three are gathered in his name,” in a family, over a cup of coffee, wherever his Word goes in the world.

In the same way, he was at work in your Baptism and now works in you because of it. He comes to be with you, giving himself to you in his Supper, so that “with Angels and Archangels, and with all the company of heaven” you can “laud and magnify” his glorious name.

Second, because God is at work through the Word which we proclaim and tell to one another and our neighbors, it is equally crucial that we know the difference between law and gospel. If we don't know the difference, the law and the gospel get confused, and

both are lost. For example, a person who does not know the difference may assume that the law is the way God justifies. Such a person then doesn't hear the gospel as a word of grace and freedom. And unless the law is watered down, such a person soon begins to hate it because it demands so much.

How do you tell the difference between law and gospel? How are they to be distinguished? Luther thought that making this distinction was the highest and most important task of theology—but he also said that it is a job that is never done.

It is a difficult distinction to make because the law and the gospel don't come to us in different kinds of words. They can't be sorted out, like buttons or apples.

The Ten Commandments are, properly speaking, law. And the promise that God justifies freely, because of Christ, through faith, is properly speaking gospel. But the same words can be both law and gospel; words that might appear to be law can be gospel and words that appear to be gospel can be law.

Take the First Commandment, for example, which Luther considered "the highest sum of the law and the highest sum of the gospel." When God says, "I am the Lord your God. . . . You shall have no other Gods. . . ." it can be the sweetest gospel because God is promising to be our God. At the same time, it can be terrifying law because it exposes the fact that I have other gods, that I am an idolator.

By the same token, hearing a passage like, "I am the resurrection and the life . . . whoever lives and believes in me shall never die" can bring a deep comfort to a person at a funeral. But another person can hear the same Word and feel condemned by it, thinking, "I haven't believed in him the way I should. I must be condemned."

It must be emphasized that as God works through the Word, he controls the Word's effect. It is the Spirit who determines whether the Word is going to come home to us as law or gospel. As Luther said, "We possess the Word, but not its effect." We don't decide whether the Word is going to be law or gospel.

But at the same time, we can be sensitive to what our words are doing. And that is the only way that we can begin to make the distinction between law and gospel—by watching what the words do. "Speaking the truth in love," as Paul says, we can use words that comfort.

For example, it doesn't take too long before pastors stop saying "if" at funerals. That little word does something—it throws hope and confidence into question, stripping away the comfort of the gospel. So a pastor doesn't say, "Wouldn't it be wonderful if so and so were one of God's people." Instead, boldly and confidently, on the basis of the fact that the person has been baptized, he says, "So and so is one of God's people and now, in death, God will keep his promise—judging this person in grace, justifying freely because of Christ."

To give another example, if you are trying to help a person who is in despair, you have to make this same kind of distinction. If you try to preach the gospel by saying something like, "Don't you know that Christ died for you? Christians shouldn't despair like this," the Word that you thought of as gospel will very likely come home as law and just aggravate the despair. On the other hand, if you can speak of how God delivers us from despair and gives us a true hope, giving hope to the person, the despair may very well lift.

Law and gospel, then, are two different ways in which God works to accomplish his purposes for his people and his creation. They are brought to bear on us by the Spirit, working through the Word proclaimed and the sacrament administered by people. And they are distinguishable on the basis on what they do: the law constrains and drives, the gospel releases, comforts, and creates us anew.

Teaching options

Because this session has such a wide range, you may want to narrow your discussion to an aspect of Chapter 6 that hits a special need of your group. For instance, if your class already has a good background in Lutheranism and is studying *Faith and Freedom* to get acquainted with the Confessions, it would be a good idea to concentrate on the distinction between law and gospel. If you're teaching this as an adult membership class, it would be better to concentrate more on the specific means of grace—discussing the Word, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper individually. You could combine this discussion with some treatment of church membership.

If you approach the lecture or discussion by emphasizing the distinction between law and gospel, the example of parents and children is one of the best ones. Parents have to use both law and

gospel. If they use all law and no gospel, the kids get surly and rebellious, trying to get away with as much as possible, or they cower in fear, never daring to open up. If it's all gospel and no law, soon disorder breaks out in the house and there is no love, only shouting.

Without using the terms *law* and *gospel*, parents wind up making the distinction between them—knowing when and how to speak a word of love that frees and heals. They learn this by consciously or unconsciously watching the effect that their words have on their children.

From this example, you can get into the purposes of the law and the gospel, the way God uses them, and how they are distinguished. Another example that might be used is the rules that are made for classrooms.

A way to spur discussion would be to argue that one of the reasons we're having so much trouble now in the family, with the high rate of divorce, kids in trouble, and so forth, is the notion that we can get along without law. See if class members can think of arguments to support or refute that assertion.

If you take the second approach, emphasizing the individual means of grace (preaching, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper), it is important to emphasize the power of the Word. This understanding was one of the key contributions of the Reformation. The church of the Middle Ages understood the Word as providing information about what happens in the sacraments. The enthusiasts or left-wingers of the Reformation believed that God came to them directly, apart from the outward Word and sacraments, and that the Word provided information about how God comes and what he wants people to do.

In contrast to both, Luther consistently emphasized the power of the Word to do what it says. As he understood it, the Word is Christ. The Word comes to us through the Bible, which is the Word of God because it proclaims Christ. And it comes to us in preaching insofar as preaching—whether from the pulpit or on the lips of a witness—proclaims Christ.

But whichever way it comes, the Word of God is powerful. It doesn't just pass along information that we then take in to ourselves and act on. Rather, the word does something to us. It either offends us or creates faith in us. It is effective, like a word of love.

Because the Spirit invests the Word with this power, it is a means of grace, bearing the gifts of Christ to us.

You might get at this idea by asking your class members to do some thinking about what brought them to faith. They'll have to point to some individual or a group of people who told them about Jesus: parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, pastors, teachers, or friends. And if you ask how faith is sustained, the same answer will come: through a word spoken by friends and acquaintances in the church.

Roy Harrisville of Luther Seminary often says, "I can't think of a single moment in my life when I've sustained my own faith." Faith comes by hearing—reflecting on how you've heard it will help to focus the discussion on the power the Word carries to us when we hear it.

A third and more general way to get into this session would be to carry on the discussion from last time and speak of how we are continually confusing means and ends.

There are all kinds of examples of this. We frequently assume that God has achieved his end or purpose when we are justified, ignoring his purpose for the whole creation. Or we assume that the church is God's purpose, and then get lost in taking care of its business needs and organization, forgetting the church's larger mission.

The same kind of thing happens with the means of grace. We take it for granted that the sermon is the preacher's word and that its most important function is to be interesting; or we take Baptism as an end rather than a beginning; or the Lord's Supper as a kind of demonstration of our own worthiness rather than a gift of Christ to sustain us on the way.

All of these are illustrations of how in our rebellion, we take God's gifts and twist them to our own ends. They can be used to explain further the destructive circle that was discussed in the last session.

From this point you could move on to discuss how God uses the law and the gospel to break this circle and open things up for us again. Then you could move on to the Word and the sacraments and the specific means through which the law and the gospel come to us. The explanation of the Third Article of the Creed in the Small Catechism would help you to do this, especially if you

concentrate on the verbs in the explanation: *called, gathered, enlightened, sanctified, kept*.

Approaching the discussion this way would also help to open up consideration of the tension between faith and unbelief in the Christian life—a consideration that will be important next session.

Questions for discussion

1. How are “enthusiasm,” as Dr. Anderson describes it on pp. 100-103, and the charismatic or neo-pentecostal movement of our time similar? How are they different? On what basis do Luther and the Confessions attack the idea that we receive a direct revelation from God?

2. If we are all priests or pastors by Baptism, what is the purpose of the office of the ministry? Could there be such a thing as too much decency and order? What happens if there isn't enough?

3. Why do you suppose there is an argument about the so-called “third use” of the law? What would be the value of a third use? How would a third use of the law be compatible with the freedom of the gospel?

4. Why does God use both Word and sacraments to accomplish his purposes with us? If God forgives through the Word proclaimed in the office of the keys, why does he give the same thing in both Baptism and the Lord's Supper? What's different about the sacraments?

5. How do you define *church*?

6. What power has Christ given the church (often referred to as the office of the keys, pp. 103-105)?

7. Tell about some of the benefits you have received from the sacraments.

8. How does Baptism fit in with our understanding of justification by faith?

9. What problems arise when we try to explain how Christ is present in the sacrament?

Questions are again likely to come up in discussion, particularly concerning Baptism. Surprisingly, discussion of Baptism almost invariably stirs up controversy. It comes out in questions like, “How can Baptism be enough?” or “Don't you have to do something to show that you've really accepted your Baptism?” and so forth.

The fault in the question, as in others discussed previously, is the assumption that faith is something we do after God has done

his work. If that were true, Baptism would be a 50-50 or a 75-25 proposition. We would have to do our part before we could count on God's promises, and all the comfort of Baptism would be lost. We would always have to be wondering if we had done our part, or had done it well enough.

The key to the question is in Luther's words, to recognize that "our faith does not constitute Baptism but receives it." Baptism requires faith—there is no doubt about it. But the faith is not something we do after God has done his work. It is something that God is at work to create in us even as we are baptized. Faith is every bit as much God's work and gift as Baptism itself.

6 The Confessions and daily life

Objectives

1. To discuss the results of justification—the shape life takes under the promise that God justifies freely, because of Christ through faith.
2. To show the relation between faith and good works.
3. To conclude the discussion of the Confessions.

Basis in “Faith and Freedom”

Chapter 7—“The Results of Justification”

“Epilog: The Lutheran Confessions in Our Lives Today”

Background

Again in Chapter 7 there is a central concept which pulls things together like the hub of a wheel. Only this time it is a concept that gets little if any treatment in the Confessions, since it wasn't a matter of controversy when the Confessions were written. Still, it was important for Luther, and while it has often been overlooked, it remains so for Lutherans. It is the concept or doctrine of vocation.

The problem in discussing the results of justification lies in what we can observe in everyday life. Having heard this good word that God justifies freely, because of Christ through faith, people often expect that the results will come like apples off a well-fertilized, fully ripe tree. The results ought to be easy to see both in the individual who has heard this Word and in the body of people who live by it.

When we have such expectations, what we actually find in life can sometimes affect us like going home from Bible camp, going back to work after a great vacation, or waking up on a Monday morning. The problems and routines of everyday life return in a

flood, and the results of our experience are difficult, if not downright impossible, to see.

This situation gets even more complicated by some of the remedies that are applied. One of the most common is to assume that while God certainly does take the initiative in justifying us, it is up to us to show the results. In this way, a wedge is driven between God's initiative and our response—it becomes a 50-50 or 75-25 proposition, what Dr. Anderson refers to as a "theology of barter."

The results of this kind of marketplace or barter theology are even worse than the Monday blues. It works just as long as we can maintain the illusion that we are keeping up our end of the bargain, showing the expected results of justification. But when the illusion is challenged—as it is by passages like those from Isaiah and Jesus which Dr. Anderson quotes—it is replaced by a terrible uncertainty. "Am I showing the results of justification?" "Have I shown enough results?" "Are the good things in my life really the result of justification or just of my own desire to look good?"

Another result of this kind of theology, in which we are supposed to produce the results of justification ourselves, is a seemingly endless and tiresome round of exhortations. We are always being told that we ought to do this or that, give this or that, or be this or that. Finally it begins to appear that only pastors and social workers can be Christians, and the rest of us, stalled in the middle of everyday life, have to muddle through in the hopes that God will somehow wink at our failure to do, give, and be exactly as expected. It becomes a legalism, a closed circle rather than an open-ended freedom.

The alternative is to take a good hard look at the assumption that the results of justification ought to be so easy to see. Taking his cue from a number of New Testament passages that challenge this assumption (the parable of the last judgment in Matthew 25, the story of Mary and Martha in Luke 10, and so forth), Luther did just that. He objected strenuously to the notion that priests, monks, and nuns were the only ones who could really be Christians, and gave a consistent emphasis to the doctrine of vocation. This teaching holds that each Christian has a calling from God in everyday life, and that God works the results of justification in that calling.

Just about any kind of a job qualifies as such a calling. Fathers and mothers have a calling: to raise their children, caring for them

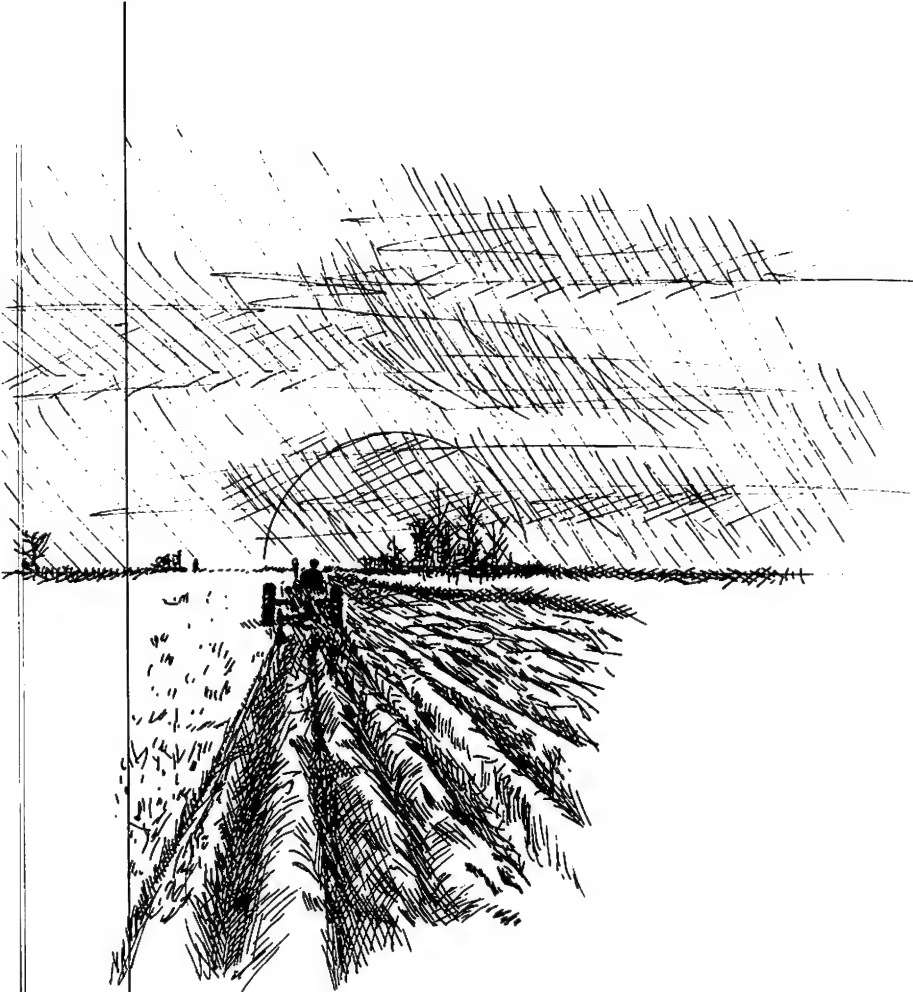
and bringing them up so that they can serve God and their neighbors. Farmers have a calling: raising crops or caring for animals that provide food or clothing and other necessities of life. Teachers have a calling: providing instruction so that people can reflect on what is going on around them and serve others. This list of callings is practically as long as the list of different kinds of jobs people do, for there are very few jobs which don't provide some kind of service in one way or another.

In these callings, the results of justification come home. After hearing the word of forgiveness, a father or mother receives the patience to put up with a demanding or rebellious child. After hearing the promise of the future given in Christ, a farmer is enabled to dig into a job that may not be paying the way it should when prices are down. A teacher is freed to devote extra attention to a student who needs it or discovers a new joy in the work. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. . . ." (Gal. 5:22-23).

This does not mean though, that the results of justification are confined to the work a person does for a living. As the parable of the good Samaritan illustrates, the results are as broad as everyday life itself. The priest and the Levite had vocations, but they didn't recognize that their vocations included people lying along roadsides. When Paul says "present your bodies as a living sacrifice," in the passage Dr. Anderson refers to from Romans 12, he is speaking of the whole of everyday life, ourselves in all of our relationships. Vocation includes then being merciful to those in need of mercy, speaking the Word to those who haven't heard it, and giving ourselves in service.

What marks this service as the result of justification is its freedom. The difference between the law and the gospel is the difference between a "you must" and a "you may." The law is coercive, always shouting about what we have or haven't done and what we should do. The gospel is gentle, saying, "You may—go ahead, you're free."

It is the difference between what used to be called "a hired man" and the son on a farm. There were all kinds of good hired men, of course, who became like members of a family. But often the hired man wasn't so free. He wanted to know just exactly what he was supposed to do, how long, and when he would be done. There were all kinds of lazy sons, too. But the sons had some freedom.



They plunged in, going about their business with some joy, often forgetting the time, gladly doing the best jobs they could without regard to recognition, honor, pay, and so forth.

It is the nature of love to have this kind of freedom. Like a mother or father who so loves the child that smelly diapers aren't that bad, a Christian is freed by the love of Christ to absorb some licks and keep serving. This kind of love doesn't know any bounds. While legalists are busy making lists, drawing boundaries, and trying to decide how much is enough, "Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not

insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Cor. 13:4-7).

Is this freedom and love visible? In every congregation there are people whose lives bear witness that it is. Because love isn't boastful, they don't always stick out, however.

For the same reasons, we generally can't see this kind of freedom and love in ourselves. It is not self-conscious—it forgets about itself. Perhaps a person becomes aware of it later, after the fact, by being told by someone else that such and such a thing was just what was needed in a situation. Or perhaps a person will even realize it herself or himself, without being told. But either way, it is rarely visible at the time.

The results of justification are not always visible because that's the way genuine freedom and love are. Neither freedom nor love can be programmed. Neither one can be demanded or forced—we are "set free" and "fall in love." Neither one knows much about itself. In both, we are carried away from ourselves and our self-concern is replaced by new and different concerns for others. That's why the sheep in the parable of the last judgment in Matthew 25 don't know that they are sheep, why Paul says in Colossians that our life "is hid with Christ in God."

There is another reason why the results of justification aren't always visible—God's love of secrecy. When he made his own love known decisively, in the cross and the resurrection, he did so by hiding himself in suffering and death, and then leaving an empty tomb appearing only to some confused and doubtful disciples. When he creates Christians, giving new life, he does it in the midst of ordinary life—often where least expected.

Finally, there is a third reason. As was pointed out in the last session and as Dr. Anderson has repeatedly indicated, in life we are both justified and sinful—simultaneously saints and sinners. The results of justification are not fully evident yet because we are not yet what we will be—released from ourselves. We still struggle with ourselves.

For all the invisibility, however, the results of justification keep coming. They turn up in the midst of everyday life in our vocations, in our encounters with our neighbors along the way. And they

turn up as we are repeatedly freed by the word that God justifies freely, because of Christ, through faith.

Teaching options

Unlike some of the previous sessions, this one has a ready-made focus. Whether you use the background material provided, organizing the discussion around the notion of vocation, or concentrate more generally on the relation of faith and love, the range of this session isn't so broad.

Whichever approach you take, a couple of things need emphasis. First of all, as indicated both in Dr. Anderson's discussion and the background material, there shouldn't be a wedge between justification and the results. Rather, it should be clearly emphasized that God not only justifies but sanctifies, producing the results of justification in us.

The connection between justification and sanctification, as Luther shows in the explanation of the Third Article, is the Word of the Spirit through the Word and the sacraments. Using these means, the Spirit works in our lives to bring forth the fruits of justification in us.

An example of this is marriage. A couple who have declared their love for one another don't stop speaking the word of love. They tell each other of their love for one another regularly, both in words and acts. And this love elicits love.

In a happy marriage, when a husband tells his wife that he loves her, her love for him is also strengthened. And as a wife speaks words of love to her husband, it brings out more love in him, too. The same kind of thing goes on between parents and children. A child's love of its mother and father is born in the love the parents have for the child.

The second thing which needs to be stressed—whether you make it the focus of the session or treat it in relation to vocation—is the connection between faith and works. As with God's initiative and our response, these aren't two separate things but are integrally wedded together.

Again the example of marriage brings out the connection. Marriage, too, is rooted in a promise. Unlike the promise of the gospel, which God makes and keeps by himself, the promise of marriage depends on both parties. But like the promise of the gospel, it takes

faith. If a marriage is going to work, both husband and wife have to take each other at their word.

This faith then goes to work in love. It would be a strange situation if a husband said on the wedding night, "Sure I believe that you love me, but I'm not interested in touching you." A husband and wife who believe they love each other can hardly wait for the wedding night—even if there is some anxiety that goes with the waiting. Afterwards, as faith is active in love, they continue to give themselves to one another in countless different ways—helping, caring, sharing, and so forth.

Again, the connection can also be brought out by speaking of the relation between parents and children. When a child is ill, for example, a parent believes the child is going to get well. But then a parent doesn't sit back and say, "Everything is going to be okay—don't bother me with your aches and pains." Rather, if it is any kind of faith at all, the parent goes to work in love, caring for the child, doing everything possible to help the child get well.

With these two emphases in mind, there are a couple of different options for lecture and discussion. One would be to start out with some general discussion of love. Christian love is the result of justification. But as much as we talk about love, in the church and out, we don't often stop to talk about what love is or just what it does.

As a result, talk of love is often as shallow as the description given to it by the songs on the "top 40." You can move beyond that by using concrete examples. Is it love when a parent spansks a child? Is it love when a man won't let a woman do what she's capable of, using her for his own sake? Is it love when a person is always talking about how loving he or she is?

You could also approach the discussion by laying out the distinction between the three kinds of love spoken of in the New Testament: brotherly love, erotic love, and agape, or unmerited, self-giving love. How do these different kinds of love work? What shape do they take in a person's life?

As a starting point, or in conjunction with one of the other methods, you could examine 1 Corinthians 13—Paul's great chapter on love.

Apply your findings in the discussion. What do these definitions of love say about the shape of new life in Christ? What happens as this love is born and developed in us?

Another way to approach the session would be to discuss some of the criticisms directed against Lutheranism in this account. It is frequently argued, as Dr. Anderson points out at the beginning of the chapter, that Lutherans have been soft in drawing out the implications of justification for new life in Christ. The charge is that they pass over loveless social situations without taking steps towards solutions.

If you take this approach, a couple of things are important. First, the fact that we understand Scripture to be saying that freedom and love are the results of the gospel doesn't mean that the law's demand for love is simply set aside. Lutherans have sometimes assumed that; arguing that the gospel is the solution to all social problems, they have shied away from speaking the word of law that constrains and drives. Demanding love can constrain and drive when such constraint and driving are needed, as they are in our world today.

Second, recognizing the tension between self-centeredness and the freedom of the gospel, we can confess our failings—not only as individuals but as churches.

Third, while we recognize failings, there is also another side to the story: Lutherans were active in the resistance movement during the second world war; Lutheran countries have enacted strong social legislation; Lutherans have supported Lutheran World Action and work among refugees after World War II and the war in Vietnam. While we certainly have sins to confess as Lutherans, there are all kinds of things our church has been involved in for which we can also give thanks.

Questions for discussion

1. Do you see evidence in your congregation or others you are familiar with of the danger Dr. Anderson speaks of—emphasizing justification to the point where we exclude concern for the Christian life? If so, how is this to be corrected?
2. Referring to the passages from Isaiah and the Gospels which Dr. Anderson cites, why do you suppose that the prophets and Jesus were hardest on the religious people?
3. If love cannot be programmed, can love create programs? Is Christian love purely an individual matter or can it take the form of social programs and legislation aimed at alleviating suffer-

ing in some way? How much should the church be involved in this kind of activity?

4. How does the doctrine of vocation go together with the freedom we are given in Christ? How do our callings provide occasion for service?

5. What continuing function might the Confessions have in your congregation? How might they help your congregation as it seeks to bear witness to the gospel?

6. For what purpose has God justified you?

Another of those tricky questions is likely to come up in this discussion, this one related to the connection between God's initiative and our response. Taking the analogies of marriage or parents with a sick child, for example, it is easy to object: "Yes, but if the marriage is going to work, the husband or wife has to respond." Or, "Sure the parents have faith that the child will get well. But who does the work? Don't the parents have to take care of the child to make it well?"

The objection looks ironclad. Husbands and wives do have to respond to one another, and the parents of a sick child who expect the child to get well have to give help and care. In the same way it can be said that we have to respond to God's love, we have to do good works if we believe.

But as soon as these "have to's" are sprung, the wedge is driven between God's initiative and our response, separating them. Response is taken to be our work, and the destructive circle opens.

Paul takes on this question when he says ". . . it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." Our heads, hands, and feet go to work in love. But the agent of this work—the one who brings about the work of our members—is the Spirit, Christ going to work in us through the Word and the sacraments.